

The Need for Psycho-education in Reducing Increased Adolescent Mental Health Issues Resulting from COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: *As the world continues to experience unprecedented impact of covid-19 pandemic, there is an exceptional increase in adolescent mental health problems cutting across all ages, due to anxiety, fear, social restrictions uncertainty and emotional distance. However, these young people' mental health is at risk. Mental health is an integral part of health and wellbeing, yet it has been neglected in Nigeria as over 60 million Nigerians have one form of mental disorder or the other with only about 20 percent seen to have the obvious form of it which the ordinary Nigerian refers to as madness. Psycho education has been found to be very effective in reducing and improving adolescent psychiatric problems. This form of intervention is important and should be introduced into school curriculum.*

Keywords: mental health; adolescents; covid-19 pandemic; pyscho-education

1. INTRODUCTION

As the world continues to experience unprecedented impact of COVID – 19 pandemic, there is an exceptional increase in mental health issues cutting across all ages, due to anxiety, fear, social restrictions uncertainty and emotional distance. Mental health is an integral part of overall health and wellbeing, yet it has been neglected in low income countries including Nigeria [1]. Mental health conditions constitute a major burden of disease for adolescents globally [2,3]. The World Health Organization in 2019, reported that about 1:7 adolescent experienced mental disorders [4]. This accounts for an estimated 166 million young people. Worldwide about (14%) 10 -19year old's experience psychological issues that is not recognized and remain largely untreated [4].

In Nigeria, several indicators show that over 60 million Nigerians have different forms of mental disorder with an estimated 20 percent seen to have the obvious form of it which the ordinary Nigerian consider as madness, schizophrenia and perhaps extreme case of drug or alcohol addiction, the remaining 80% or 48 million cases are ignored or completely poorly understood [5]. According to Peter Hawkins United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) representative to Nigeria before the pandemic, far too many children were burdened under the weight of unaddressed mental health issues, this has been compounded by the pandemic [6]. Results from a survey conducted by [6] in 21 nations including Nigeria showed that a median of 1 in 6 young people aged 15-24 often feel depressed or have little interest in doing things, are worried, nervous or anxious.

While there is are volumes of literature on the mental health literacy of adults, much attention has not be given to adolescent mental health literacy in Nigeria [7,8] and the national adolescent health policy (NAHP) do not earnestly address mental health among adolescents and young adults [8]. Similarly, available evidence suggests that in Nigeria, there is a high level of ignorance about mental illness and negative attitude towards individuals with mental disorders especially among adolescent [5]. As these people with mental health challenges are perceived to have spiritual attack and consequently traditional and religious leaders are usually the first point of consultation [10].

Adolescence is a period when young people are struggling to fit in socially and emotionally [11]. It is an important period in which these young people move from being children to adults [12]. Interestingly, at this stage adolescent are especially vulnerable to bullying, social isolation and other vices associated with adolescents. According to [13] bullying, trauma and other issues these people experience may cause mental health issues. Sadly, adolescent mood onset disorders are frequently unrecognized or misdiagnosed and often go untreated, most especially in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic's physical restrictions and social distancing measures have affected each and every domain of life [14]. Although the number of adolescents affected by the disease maybe unknown, the disease and the containment measures such as social distancing, school closure, and isolation have negatively impacted on the mental health and well-being of adolescents. The effect of the pandemic on the mental health of adolescent is alarming, as there has been increased level of stress, depression, sleep apnea and social exclusion which if not properly addressed may result to more young people becoming suicidal [15]. Consequently, reports shows that though the pandemic affected both adolescents and adults, however, there are projections that its impact on adolescents' mental health could last longer due to the peculiarities associated with their stage of development and the resultant effect will be negative on the larger society unless it is properly addressed. [16,17]. Moreso, as the world move towards post COVID era, is need to provide tailored intervention such as psycho-education to address young people's mental health challenges. Therefore, this paper sought to.

1.2 Aim and Objectives

This paper sought to present psycho-education as an effective technique towards promoting adolescent mental health. The objectives of this paper were to:

- present situational analysis of mental health issues in Nigeria
- present psycho-education as an effective technique towards promoting adolescent mental health

2. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Available evidence shows that a little above 60 million Nigerians have one form of mental disorder or the other with only about 20 per cent of persons in such category seen to have the obvious forms of it [18,19], most Nigerians are ignorant of the severity of the illness and so they refer to it as madness or mere addiction; a reason that has largely made mental disorder in the remaining 80 per cent or 48 million Nigerians ignored or poorly understood. Consequently, the pandemic has contributed immensely in worsening adolescent mental health because of measures (restrictions on movement) that were adopted to cope the spread of the disease. These measures include school closure, reduced face to face interaction and support system, social isolation and other pandemic related challenges has contributed to an increased environment of stress, anxiety, and fear [20, 21]. Isolation from peers is especially difficult for adolescents and may increase suicide ideation in that population

According to [6] about 7,079,815 Nigerians are suffering from depression which is one of the most misunderstood forms of mental disorder in the country. Depression is a severe mood disorder and it is the most frequently diagnosed psychiatric disorder amongst adolescents. It is a state that adolescents can fall easily into. This disorder affects an estimated 3.9 per cent of the entire population including adolescent. This, according to [6], represents about 3.9 per cent of the population including adolescent. Sadly, this situation has made Nigeria the most depressed country in Africa.

In terms of COVID -19 related anxiety disorder several studies have established an association between the COVID-19 pandemic and rates of anxiety among adolescents [24,25]. For example, a study in China conducted by [22] identified that low support from loved ones increased the likelihood of anxiety disorder among study participants while in another study carried out by Chen et al. [19] the researcher reported that there was no significant difference between COVID-19 and anxiety among adolescents. However, in Africa, [6] estimated that about 4,894,557 Nigerians have anxiety disorder while in Ethiopia approximately 4,480,113 people have anxiety disorder which is closely followed by the Democratic Republic of Congo with 2,871,309, South Africa with 2,402,230, and Tanzania with 2,138,939 sufferers. Similarly, in a survey conducted by [4], results from respondents indicates that in Nigeria, 1 in 6 young people aged 15-24 anxiety disorder as a result of the pandemic outbreak and the lockdown restrictions placed on them as a result of the above, most of these young people have little interest in doing things or are either worried.

Furthermore, as the pandemic moves closer to slowing down, the impact on young people's mental health and well-being continues to weigh in heavily. Existing evidence have shown that there is a direct association between COVID-19 and anxiety disorder and most of it is caused by stress [23]. According [6], globally, at least 1 in 7 children between the ages of 6-18 has been directly negatively impacted by lockdowns, while over 1.6 billion of this population have suffered educational setbacks. This implies that the disruption to routines, education, recreation, including concerns for other family members and income, has left many adolescents around the world including Nigeria feeling afraid, depressed, anxious and concerned for their future.

Report shows that the prevalence of issues such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is high as a result of the emergence of the pandemic [24]. Studies from China showed prevalence of PTSD to be 4.6% and 7% respectively, PTSD are more commonly associated with female gender and poor sleep quality [25]. This type of disorder have negative effect on adolescent mental health especially among young girls. Girls are estimated to be twice as likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as compared to boys [26]. Post-traumatic stress disorders in teens have an effect on brain development.

However, post-traumatic stress resulting from the onset of the pandemic has left many people distressed. A report indicates that in Iran most people are suffering mild to moderate distress due to COVID-19 [27] while the fear of COVID-19 has increased the incidence of pre-existing posttraumatic stress disorder in most adolescents. Moreso, majority of young Nigerians were reported to have experienced depression and anxiety during lockdown resulting from the pandemic [28].

Self- Harm was one of the reported leading causes of death in adolescents between 15 – 19 years with a rate of 13.9deaths per day and 100 -200 attempts. In the face of the pandemic there has also been a rise in suicide cases due to depression [29]. Adolescent struggling with poor grades in school could be at risk of suicide because of depression, sadness and as a result of family dysfunction, problems with sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or sexual abuse, harmful use of alcohol, abuse in childhood, stigma and more especially now isolation as a result of the pandemic [30].

2.1 Use of Psycho-education to Improve Mental Health

Psycho-education is an evidence based educational programs that is used to provide well designed information and trainings for people with mental health and also their families to work collaboratively with mental health professionals as part of an overall plan to improve their mental health [31]. Psycho-education improves mental health outcomes for persons with schizophrenia, depression, anxiety disorder and other major mental illnesses and behavioral disorders. The goals of psycho-education are to prevent people with mental issues from relapsing after an intervention, ensuring treatment adherence, and to promote their re-entry into their home communities, with particular regard for their social and occupational functioning.

Psycho-educational programs are built on theories and depend on the psychological theory the program is adhering to. Some of these psycho-educational programs place emphasis on inner drives and emotions, and the resolution of inner conflicts. These principles are used in ways that allow programs to focus on solutions to problems within a dynamic context, and within both individual and group situations. While behavioral psycho-education focuses primarily on observable or learned characteristics. Behavioral psycho-educational programs use principles of reinforcement in order to modify behaviours in troubled individuals. In addition, these programs focus on the interplay between cognition, effect, and actions, and these components are used in order to improve social skills and self- management in addition to modifying learned behaviours [32].

In contrast to other forms of psycho-education, sociological psycho-education relies on the peer group as the primary agent of change in modifying troubled thinking, behaving, and social performance. For this program to be effective peer relationships, culture, and shared concerns of the peer group to correct unwanted social behaviours are vital. A supportive, therapeutic environment is considered to be extremely important in sociological psycho-education. Ensuring a supportive environment is believed to help foster positive changes in relationships with adults and teenagers [33]. More so, in ecological psycho-education it is believed that those skills that are suboptimal can be re-taught and re-learned. To design a program in ecological psycho-education expert, combine mental health therapy, education, and human service approaches in order to address the complex social systems and interpersonal factors that interact in the lives of troubled children and adolescents. The utilization of multiple approaches is designed to re-formulate the skills, behaviors, and social interactions of disturbed youth.

Available data shows that the above-mentioned types of psycho-education and other psycho-education techniques may be just as effective as traditional therapeutic approaches in improving adolescent mental health and concerns. For example, a study conducted by [34] to determine the effects of a psychological intervention that includes psycho-education and basic elements of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) on depressed medication-treated adolescents in Nigeria. Results from the study showed a significant decrease in depressive symptom, improvements in adolescents' knowledge of depression, hope, and attitude towards treatment adherence one week after the intervention.

Similarly in another study conducted by [35] to ascertain the effect of psycho-educational program on improving adolescents' knowledge, attitudes, coping strategies, and feelings of hopelessness specifically concerning suicidal ideations. The study consisted of 172 non-clinical participants. The participants were divided into one of four groups: a treatment group assessed multiple times during the program, a treatment group only assessed at the end of the program, a control group assessed multiple times throughout the study, and a control group assessed only one time during the study. Report indicates that there were no improvement in coping with the feeling of hopelessness, however, there was significant improvements in adolescents' knowledge about suicidal thoughts and their attitudes about suicidal persons also improved.

Psycho-educational program helps to improve adolescent self- esteem and also it can be administered in a multi-family group. To show the effectiveness of this intervention using a multi-family group including adolescents, [35] conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of multi-family psycho-education group therapy (MFPGT) in children with mood or anxiety disorders, to assess the change in knowledge and awareness of mood and anxiety disorders in children. Furthermore, to compare the relative effectiveness of online compared to live MFPG. The researchers found that online and live education groups showed similar overall improvements in acquired knowledge and expressed emotion in participating families. This suggests that psycho-education could be used effectively to help adolescent build coping skills.

Most importantly as the world reopens again with some adolescent adversely affected with various mental health issues resulting from lockdown due to the pandemic, it is important that public health programs are designed to address these emerging psychiatric challenge among young people. Hence, the use of psycho-educational techniques could help to reduce incidence of teenage mental health issues.

3. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

This paper has presented situational analysis of mental health issues in Nigeria and recommended the use of psycho-education to help improve adolescent mental health. To reduce the amount of psychiatric challenges triggered by the emergence of the Pandemic, All relevant authorities should organize programs and awareness campaigns to tackle this menace. These programs would educate young people on how to take care of their mental health and why they need to take care of their loved ones.

Health educators and relevant stakeholders should advocate for the inclusion of psycho-education in school curriculum. This could help prevent these problems. Additionally, for those with psychiatric problems it may help them cope and manage their situation.

Although most studies reviewed for effectiveness had smaller sample sizes, however, the outcome of this intervention as shown in this review is promising and researchers should upscale this intervention in research to include larger population.

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